

# SALT : The questions have to be answered, but the merits are clear to us

WITH ONLY the filling in of the technical blanks remaining before a Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty is completed, the question of how to frame the debate becomes critical.

The Carter administration has already begun to lay out its position—Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and Zbigniew Brzezinski, the president's national security adviser, have made major speeches recently—and the basic theme is clear: The treaty will enhance national security and help to control the costs of the arms race.

That fundamental thesis—holding out modest but important hopes about what the SALT II agreement will mean—will have to be restated many times between now and the time the Senate votes.

It is similarly clear what overriding questions stand in the way of attaining the two-thirds Senate vote needed: Is the treaty verifiable? And do the technical limits impose a disadvantage on the U.S. and tend to create or further an imbalance between ourselves and the Soviet Union?

Those are both serious questions. Admiral Stansfield Turner, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, said recently, in secret testimony released this week, that the loss of Iranian listening posts has indeed hurt the CIA's ability to monitor the agreement. Secretary Brown countered the next day by asserting that the gap, such as it is, would be filled by 1980 and would not pose a serious problem for verification.

Clearly, the Carter administration will have to present a compelling case that its verification process is adequate and that there is no serious chance for cheating. The disagreement between Admiral Turner and Secretary Brown must be dealt with definitively. We think it can be, but it is important that honest doubts be satisfied.

Likewise, it is important that the difficult technical questions be debated and researched honestly. We think, from what

we have seen so far, that the gains far outweigh the risks in imposing limits on certain kinds of weapons development. But they are honest questions, and they have to be answered.

The process seems unlikely to produce outright rejection, though there are certainly senators and thought leaders who would like to see that. What may be more likely is an attempt to attach to the treaty so many reservations that it will become unacceptable to the Soviet Union.

It would be a grave mistake for the Senate to try to kill the treaty by renegotiating it on the Senate floor. The effects on U.S. relations with the Soviet Union could well be disruptive for many years to come.

The U.S. must struggle constantly to maintain just the right balance in our approach to the Soviet Union, a balance between wariness and willingness to seek accommodation where accommodation is possible. We think, in general, that the SALT agreement maintains that balance.

Its ratification, we think, is both a necessity and an opportunity for the U.S. Rejection would be more of a tragedy for the president's ability to make foreign policy than any congressional action in many a year and would have a thoroughly disruptive effect on our relations with the Soviet Union. Approval could mean some sensible gains for world stability and for more effective control of the arms race.

